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ABSTRACT

Colleges should be administered by educators. An academic administrator insensitive to educational purpose and process is destined for failure. Failure is also the probable destiny for the academic administrator whose performance is not anchored in the concept sense of administration. The mastery and artistic application of major administrative concepts enable us to avoid managerial mechanics and administrative clucking, to establish an administrative competence that both facilitates and inspires the work of collegues. These are major obligations of administration. The times incline us toward pessimism and negativism. But this is precisely when we need the unique act of administrative leadership. (Author/KE)

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THE BEST AND MOST PHILOSOPHICAL INVENTION OF THE HUMAN MIND

--ITS ADMINISTRATIVE USE--

A PAPER PREPARED

FOR THE

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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MARCH 1975

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THE BEST AND MOST PHILOSOPHICAL INVENTION OF THE HUMAN MIND

--ITS ADMINISTRATIVE USE--

> Life has not taught me to expect nothing, but she has taught me not to expect success to be the inevitable result of my endeavors. . . .Life has taught me that active loving saves me from a morbid preoccupation with the shortcomings of society and the waywardness of men.
>
> Alan Paton, What I Have Learned

For this occasion, I had originally planned reflections entitled "The Concept Sense of Academic Administration." The title derives from my conviction that "common sense" does not always provide an adequate guide for explanation or action. This is true in both the physical and social sciences, and I believe it to be true in administration.

I agree with John Silber that colleges should be administered by educators and that an academic administrator insensitive to educational purpose and process is destined for failure.[1] But I take the matter a step further. Failure is also the probable destiny for the academic administrator whose performance is not anchored in the "concept sense" of administration. The mastery and artistic application of major administrative concepts enable us to avoid managerial mechanics and administrative clucking, to establish an administrative competence that both facilitates and inspires the work of colleagues, which in my mind are major obligations of administration, in the academy and out.

But I have decided that this is a conviction that can be rested within these opening remarks. Moreover, I have been provoked into another theme, one that I believe may be more important at this juncture in higher education

history and to our potential to effect its course. Let me introduce that theme by looking back for a moment to a series of events during the internship year.

Living in Nashville this year has provided several opportunities to discover the basis of its claim as "Music City." Among these opportunities have been an elegant evening at the Nutcracker Ballet, pleasant moments with the easy sounds of the George Shearing quintet, and a footstomping frolic at the Grand Ole Opry. It is from the latter, of course, that Nashville gets most of its reputation. One evening I heard a country music version of Alexander Pope's beatitude "Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed." In the closing lines of a country hit entitled "Crude Oil Blues"--popular during the gasoline crisis--is the less sophisticated but clear translation hanging on a closed gasoline pump and reading "He who expects little ain't gonna be disappointed."

This bit of second-hand country philosophy connected with events in my professional life in a timely way. I attended this spring a "Seminar on Statewide Planning in Higher Education," one of a series conducted as part of the Inservice Education Program under the auspices of the Education Commission of the States and State Higher Education Executive Officers. There were gathered coordinating and governing agency personnel from over the country.

The seminar setting established by director Lyman Glenny and others was certainly not one of buoyant optimism. There was clear indication of the need to dig in for hard times, to consider carefully the current environment to planning activities--the potential for stabilized and declining enrollments in coming years, for an uncertain economy, and for a "low priority" attitude among legislators and state officials. The mood was one of caution and concern.

Certainly some of these attitudes are easy to find in Tennessee, where we have had a rather grim financial year, and both executive and legislative

officials have been particularly aggressive in examining higher education budget requests. Economic conditions and competing priorities for public service have led higher education with a smaller portion of the fiscal pie. The increase in dollars to be appropriated this year will be about 2.5 percent--at a time when inflation is eating away at a rate of 10 to 15 percent and energy costs are driving campus utility bills up by a factor of two and/or more.

Meanwhile, back at the campus level, administrative colleagues at both Memphis State and other colleges are not only trying to deal wisely the impact of this fiscal crunch, they are also spending increasing amounts of time dealing with tenure battles, promotion puzzles, and the rubbers of collective negotiation. So that life does not get too predictable, diversions are provided by visitors from OCR who drop in to debate salary data of selected female faculty with male counterparts and advise women that both salary the institution owes. The discomfort of sitting on this in academic pluckit fence is made palpable by assorted lawsuits from faculty to and students, and resolutions from the legislature directing studies of faculty workload and law school admissions policies. This is a time when it is it certainly easier to expect the worse and then avoid disappointment.

The times incline us toward pessimism and negativism. Resist this practically when we need the unique out of administrative leadership. That act is to provide a touch of unwarranted optimism--to hold ourselves our faculties some vision of the purpose of our endeavor, to generate for productive and creative channels of activity when conventional avenues close in congest, and to invest in the resiliency of the human spirit by in expecting the best effort from ourselves and those who work with us. The antidote is both simply put. We're more likely to get the best if we expect really less.

Administrative colleagues occasionally accuse me of being an idiot. They suggest that I should entitle my remarks "How to be a Successful Failure

[illegible] a [illegible] [illegible]? [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

It is easy to find in the chronicle of the past sufficient reason for pessimism. But there is a persuasive counter-position. I find it forcefully expressed in remarks by Dr. Rene Dubos, writing in the 1973-74 winter issue of The American Scholar. He testifies as follows:

> . . . I believe that optimism is essential for action and constitutes the only attitude compatible with sanity. As the French historian Elie Halvey wrote to one of his friends in 1895, "Pessimism is nothing but a state of mind, whereas optimism is a system, the best and the most philosophical invention of the human mind." Optimism is a creative philosophical attitude, because it encourages taking advantage of personal and social crises for the development of novel and more sensible ways of life.[11]

Here, I think, is the key passage. To argue that the quality of our first expectations is a major determinant of the kinds of behavior we will elicit is not to take an ostrich-like view that we have no crisis and no distorted human personality. It does suggest that constructive and creative response to challenge is not likely to emerge from defeatism and pessimism.

The record of higher education is not a museum filled with fossils of years gone by and finished works hanging on the walls. We are not through. It is a progress that requires us to address continuing challenge. In his work The Ascent of Man the late Jacob Bronowski reminds us that:

> . . . man is the only one who is not locked into his environment. His imagination, his reason, his emotional subtlety and toughness make it possible for him not to accept the environment, but to change it.[12]

My position is that we cannot place these human qualities in the service of higher education, unless we first have the commitment to do so. And the kind of optimism I have in mind is neither patient nor passive. On the contrary, it is aggressive in looking for every possibility of constructive action within the realm of practical possibility. Perhaps this is enough philosophical wandering. What can we find in the empirical world to sustain our confidence in the proposition? Let us turn our attention there for a moment.

THE RESEARCH CONNECTION--EXPECTATION AND PERFORMANCE

What I have shared thus far is personal experience buttressed by selected philosophical support. I place high value on learning from experience. In fact, experience is probably the most frequent mode of learning for administrators. Since good habits are formed by practice, the way to become a good administrator is to administer. But since bad habits are also learned through action, it turns out that bad administration is also learned through experience.

Fortunately, we do not always have to place our hand on the hot stove of experience to learn that we can get burned. As professionals, we should attend to conceptual and objective data as well, to place ideas in the service of improved performance. I want now to cite two or three examples that offer some research support for my theme.

The first of these illustrations reveals how expectations can condition our approach to scholarship and theory building. I find it amusing but also disturbing. In his text on Principles of Behavior Modification, psychologist Albert Bandura reports a case in which behaviorists induced a bizzare broom-carrying behavior in an adult schizophrenic by periodic positive reinforcement.[13] They then delivered the patient to a psychotherapist who was unaware of previous reinforcement conditions.

In the case report, the psychotherapist wrote the following analysis: "Her constant and compulsive pacing, holding a broom in the manner she does, could be seen as a ritualistic procedure, a magical action. Her broom could then be: a child that gives her love and she gives in turn her devotion, a phallic symbol; the scepter of an omnipotent queen."

Now the analysis of this patient's behavior proceeds from a theory base with a clear set of expectations, which are revealed in the case report. The analysis of the behavior is perhaps less troublesome than the therapy

which might be prescribed. As a postscript, the broom-carrying behavior was easily extinguished by removal of the reinforcement and required no interpretative probing of the patient's sexual conflicts or repressed past. Those of you in the social behavioral sciences can recall other examples in which the expectations of researchers have biased research findings. What is the lesson here for administration? It is that our assumptions and associated philosophical set condition our perception of events around us. To be consistent, this holds no less true for optimism and high expectations than it does for the pessimist. The test is which posture yields the most effective results in terms of goals sought and cost--human and fiscal.

The second example I take from a recent and well-known study that dealt with the influence of our expectations. It was first reported in the book Pygmalion in the Classroom by Robert Rosenthal and more recently summarized in the September 1973 issue of Psychology Today. Stay with me for a brief report of what Rosenthal found:

> . . . Fode and I told a class of 12 students that one could produce a strain of intelligent rats by inbreeding them to increase their ability to run mazes quickly. To demonstrate, we gave each student five rats which had to learn to run to the darker of two arms of a T-maze. We told half of our student experimenters that they had the "maze bright," intelligent rats; we told the rest that they had the stupid rats. Naturally, there was no real difference among any of the animals.
>
> But they certainly differed in their performance. The rats believed to be bright improved daily in running the maze--they ran faster and more accurately--while the supposedly dull animals did poorly. The "dumb" rats refused to budge from the starting point 29 percent of the time, while the "smart" rats were recalcitrant only 11 percent of the time.
>
> Then we asked our students to rate the rats and to describe their own attitudes toward them. Those who believed they were working with intelligent animals liked them better and found them more pleasant. Such students said they felt more relaxed with the animals; they treated them more gently and were more enthusiastic about the experiment than students who thought they had dull rats to work with. Curiously, the students with "bright" rats said that they handled them more but talked to them less. One wonders what students with "dull" rats were saying to those poor creatures.[14]

I interrupt Rosenthal's narrative here to plead that you not dismiss the results thus far simply because we are dealing with rats. And I also caution against any transference of the animal label to colleagues of any variety. Let us hear what Rosenthal next did:

> If rats act smarter because their experimenters think they are smarter, we reasoned, perhaps the same phenomenon was at work in the classroom. So in the mid 1960's Lenore Jacobson and I launched what was to become a most controversial study: Intellectual Bloomers. We selected an elementary school in a lower-class neighborhood and gave all the children a nonverbal IQ test at the beginning of the school year. We disguised the test as one that would predict "intellectual blooming." There were 18 classrooms in the school, three at each of the six grade levels. The three rooms for each grade consisted of children with above average ability, average ability, and below average ability.
>
> After the test, we randomly chose 20% of the children in each room and labeled them "intellectual bloomers." We then gave each teacher the names of these children, who, we explained, could be expected to show remarkable gains during the coming year on the basis of their test scores. In fact, the differences between these experimental children and the control group was solely in the teacher's mind.
>
> Our IQ measure required no speaking, reading, or writing. One part of it, a picture vocabulary, did require a greater comprehension of English, so we call it the verbal subtest. The second part required less ability to understand language but more ability to reason abstractly, so we call it the reasoning subtest.
>
> We retested all the children eight months later. For the school as a whole, we found that the experimental children, those whose teacher had been led to expect "blooming," showed an excess in overall IQ gain of four points over the IQ gain of the control children. Their excess in gain was smaller in verbal ability, two points only, but substantially greater in reasoning, where they gained seven points more than the controls. Moreover, it made no difference whether the child was in a high ability or low ability classroom. The teachers' expectations benefited children at all levels.[15]

The final example I take from a paper appearing in the November 1970 issue of Educational Leadership, a paper by Arthur Combs entitled "The Human Aspect of Administration."[16] The basic question explored by Combs and his associates in their research work was this: "How can you tell the

difference between good practitioners and poor ones in the helping professions: social work, teaching, psychiatry, clinical psychology, administration, counseling, nursing." Here is what they found.

Not in the amount and kind of knowledge practitioners possessed was the difference found but in their behavior patterns, especially in the quality and character of first or instantaneous reactions. In Combs' words:

> . . . We think that, in a human being, what makes the difference is the belief system the person holds. Especially this has to do with what *you* believe is important.[17]

Other important discriminating factors were these:

> Good helpers are concerned with people and poor helpers with things.
>
> Good helpers believe that people are able instead of unable, dependable rather than undependable, worthy rather than unworthy.
>
> Good helpers have positive self-concepts, whereas poor helpers see themselves as unwanted, unable, undignified, unacceptable.
>
> Good helpers are likely to have purposes which are altruistic rather than narcissistic.
>
> Good helpers are not concerned with what methods are used but do methods fit. They are neither directive nor non-directive, hard or easy, authoritarian or participative.

And here I will take an interpretative liberty with Combs' conclusions to suggest that good helpers are professional artists who place ideas and technique in action with a sensitivity to person and place. I draw your attention to the second finding mentioned--the one about the assumptions good helpers make of others. But I want to observe as well that there is a rich mine of concepts in the other findings. In particular, the one about the self-concept of good helpers is worth noting. If you will permit a short diversion, I recall forceful support from Abraham Zaleznik's book The Human Dilemmas of Leadership:

> The exercise of leadership requires a strong sense of identity--knowing who one is and who one is not. The myth of the value of being an "all-around guy" is damaging to the striving of an individual to locate himself from within and then to place himself

> in relation to others. This active location and placement of oneself prevents the individual from being defined by others in uncongenial terms. It prevents him also from being buffeted around the sea of opinion he must live within. A sense of autonomy, separateness, or identity permits a freedom of action and thinking necessary for leadership.[10]

The implication here is that the administrator who has the healthiest sense of personal identity, who knows both strengths and limitations, will be the one from whom you can expect the most effective leadership. Test that idea in your own experience.

It seems to me that we do have some evidence from the empirical and research world to support our proposition that positive expectations, a touch of unwarranted optimism, does tend to elicit higher levels of performance. I repeat for emphasis: this does not mean that the academic administrator is always a nice guy, that he *never* gets mad, never raises his voice. But it does mean that, if he hopes to call out the best in his associates, the probability is higher if he begins by expecting the best.

Before I close this discussion of the research support, there is a related thought that I would like to entertain. I hesitate because of a penchant for order and relevance. But since my friends tell me that these are euphemisms I use to camouflage my rigidity, I will inject at this point a one-point sermonette.

A related and powerful tool available to the academic administrator, or to any administrator for that matter, is that of reinforcing colleagues for work well done. The reinforcement of desired behavior has a research basis, if a philosophically controversial one, in the work of psychologist B. F. Skinner and others of the behavioral bent. We know from an array of research that proper reinforcement of behavior is an effective method of promoting the recurrence of that behavior.

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[illegible]

[illegible]

[17] Ibid., p. 198.

[18] Abraham Zaleznik, Human Dilemmas of Leadership, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 41-42.

[19] Wall Street Journal, February 11, 1975, p. 5.

[20] Robert L. Hambin, "Leadership and Crises, Sociometry, 1958, pp. 322-335.

[21] Amitai Etzioni, "Human Beings Are Not Very Easy to Change After All," Saturday Review, June 3, 1973, pp. 45-46.

[22] Erich Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), p. 438.